‘Chat’ cuts the queue: more of us abandon the phone

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WE ARE increasingly turning away from the phone and "talking" to companies online, says a new study.

The number of "web chats" between customers and UK call centres has increased by 60pc in a year, and will total 250m in 2014, according to analysts ContactBabel.

However, the telephone remains the most popular type of contact with 8 billion calls made to UK call centres each year.

The phone still accounts for 70pc of contacts with web chat at 2.7pc; the remainder are mostly email, with social media and letters also important.

In a survey of 215 call centres, ContactBabel found that 40pc offered web chat on their websites and another 28pc planned to offer the service within a year.

The report's author, Steve Morrell, said: "With the huge growth in online shopping and banking, customers demand live and instant help.

"They do not want to queue on the phone or wait for hours – or even days -- for an email response."

Increasingly, he said, companies were offering a "virtual agent" service where software examines a customer's query and attempts to answer it automatically. If this fails, the customer is transferred to a human.

The UK has 5,700 call centres employing about 1.2m people – more than any other country outside the US -- which account for around 1 in 25 of British jobs.

"The 2014 UK Contact Centre Decision-Makers' Guide, 12th edition", is free of charge online.

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The report is available at www.contactbabel.com/reports.cfm

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